

A Short and Modest
VINDICATION
OF THE
COMMON PRACTICE
OF
Cursing and Swearing;

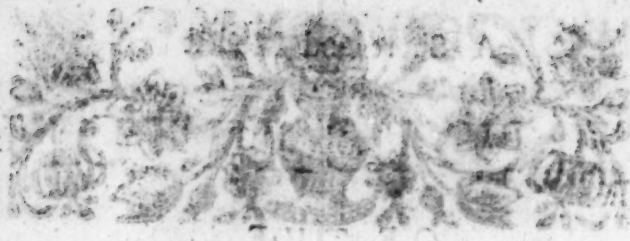
Occasion'd by
The New Act of Parliament against
the said Practice.

By a GENTLEMAN.



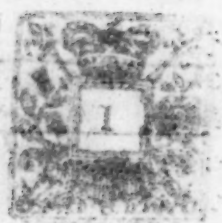
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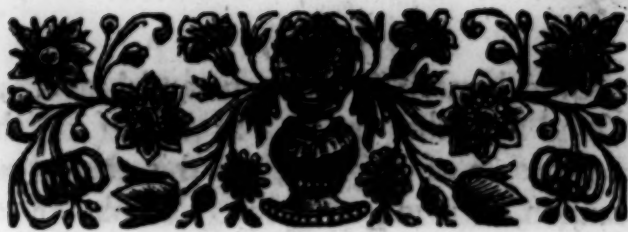


VINDICATION
OF THE
COMMON PRACTICE
OF
SWEARING

cannot but lament, with a
mixture of surprise, that in
the present printed Age, in
which not only the best
copies of the same are to
much, and not only, but even
these Propositions to a new
and, no doubt, more useful
in the Defence of the Cause, and
not, in the Defence of the Cause, and
which the manuscript, in the new
and, no doubt, more useful
and, no doubt, more useful
(The Editor's Note)



11/20



A
VINDICATION
OF THE
COMMON PRACTICE
OF
SWEARING, &c.



Cannot but lament, with a Mixture of Surprize, that, in this publick spirited Age, in which not only the real Principles of Patriotism are so much inculcated, but even mere Pretensions to it are become *A-la-mode*, no *Englishman* hath yet appeared in the Defence of his Country, against those Incroachments upon her Liberties which she must suffer, if the new Act of Parliament against Swearing, &c. is vigorously enforced: However, as no one hath already

approved himself so generous and brave, as to stand up, tho' singly, in behalf of the good People of *England*, on this dangerous Occasion, it is indeed some Consolation to me, to reflect that the Honour of first appearing in so great and good a Cause, will be wholly and solely my own.

Every Body knows that Custom is one of the strongest human Authorities, that many of our excellent old Laws and most valuable Privileges are founded only on Prescription, and that the parliamentary Authority of this Kingdom hath been obliged to admit and confirm to us the Benefit and Possession of such Laws and Privileges, meerly out of Deference to the Antiquity of the Customs on which they are founded. 'Tis under the Sanction of this Authority that I take upon me to animadvert on the Proceedings of the legislative Power. To speak and write freely on any Subject, is the distinguish'd Birth-Right Privilege of an *Englishman*; a Privilege which the Government hath never once attempted to supersede, except in Cases of Treason against the Throne, or where the Reputation or Property of a single Person is attack'd, which is invading the Province of the Law.

Hence it is that every Subject of the *British* Crown, who thinks himself qualified to set up for an Author, (of which Sort there
is

is no inconsiderable Number in his *Britannick* Majesty's Dominions) thinks himself also justly entitled to the Privilege of Scanning, remarking, observing, canvassing, applauding, or censuring the Conduct of his Countrymen, not excepting the most dignified of them; no not even the King himself, so long (as hath been observed) as he keeps without the Pale of Treason, &c. If a Treaty with any foreign State is concluded, contrary to his Approbation, he takes up his Pen, and, without the least Reserve, lays before the Publick his solemn Protestation against it. If a new Law is made, or an old one abrogated; if a great Man takes a Journey, or a Dose of Physick; if a new Book is published, or a young Author admired; in short upon the ordinary or extraordinary Occurrences of every Day throughout the Year, he thinks he has a Right to publish his Sentiments; and this he never fails to do with Impunity, no Man saying to him *What dost thou?* which indeed would be a very impertinent Question, as every Body knows this has been the Custom and constant Practice of Writers of all Denominations, Time out of Mind: And such is the Veneration universally Paid to Custom, that whatever has the Sanction of her Authority takes Place of all Opposition, whether King's Com-

Commands, parliamentary Resolutions, or the Convictions of Sense and Reason.

However, as the general Principles, Maxims, and Conduct of Mankind, are all liable to some Exceptions or Deviations, so notwithstanding what I have asserted concerning the Force and Prevalence of Custom, it must be allowed, that this hath sometimes been rudely attacked by other Authorities: and tho' in the Instance I am going to mention, such Attacks have hitherto proved unsuccessful, yet I cannot help being filled with Apprehensions of what may still happen, unless a certain illustrious Assembly can be prevailed with to recal some Part of its late Proceedings. The Reader will easily perceive that I hint at the new and also at the former Acts of Parliament against Swearing, commonly called prophane Swearing, &c. It is well known to all who are conversant with the History and Manners of the *English* Nation, that Swearing and Cursing hath been constantly and uninterruptedly practiced by this People, from Time immemorial: And it is equally notorious how tenacious they are of their Customs and Privileges. Now I will appeal to any Man of common Sense; nay, to every Member of the present Parliament, even to those who voted for the Act in Question, (for I cannot suppose

suppose but that some were wise and conscientious enough to oppose it) whether or not it is proper, in such critical and dangerous Times as these, to make Innovations in the antient Customs and Manners of the People; especially in Matters of such Importance, and which may create such universal Discontent?

We ought now more than ever to be cautious of giving *Jacobites*, and other ill-designing Persons, who are disaffected to the present Government, the least Handle for infusing Jealousies and Fears into the Minds of the People. How easy a Matter is it for those who think it their Interest to spread continual Alarms through his Majesty's Dominions, by misrepresenting the Measures of the Administration, to make less artful and honest Folks than themselves believe that all Attempts which the King and Parliament have ever made to annihilate or abridge the common Practice of Swearing, &c. are only so many Blows obliquely aimed at the Freedom of the Press, that Paladium of *British Liberty*? Doubtless it will not be long after the Publication of the new Act, e'er certain of our News-paper Authors, whom it is needless to point out, together with the whole Class of such Coffee-house Statesmen as borrow their Politics from those Authors, will be found declaiming

ing against it with their usual Force of Logic and Rhetorick. Methinks I already hear them asserting, " that the Liberty of
 " the Press, and the Liberty of Speech, in
 " which the free Use of Cursing and Swearing
 " is certainly included, are so strictly
 " connected together, that like a Child born
 " with two Heads, you cannot hurt the one
 " without making the other cry out. That
 " if People are prohibited the Use of profane
 " Swearing and Cursing, for corroborating
 " their Arguments, and gaining Credit to whatever they assert, whether the
 " Conversation turn upon Religion, News,
 " strange Stories, merry Jest, &c. all Disputation must very soon cease, and even
 " the Sound of the human Voice be no more
 " heard in this Island, except from the Pulpit;
 " or where two or three other Folks of Singular
 " Manners are gathered together. For as the antient Practice of Swearing
 " and Cursing is now thoroughly established in all Parts of the *British* Dominions;
 " as it is now deeply rooted in the Minds and the Tongues of the People
 " (if the Expression may be allowed) and as they have been accustomed to it almost
 " from their Cradles, so they may be neither willing nor able to leave off the Practice:
 " Consequently, they must be reduced to the melancholy Necessity of holding their
 " Tongues,

“ Tongues, and conversing, like Monsieur
 “ *Harlequin*, by dumb Signs; or else, ei-
 “ ther through Wilfulness or Inadvertency,
 “ they must so often incur the Penalties of
 “ the Law, as may end in the utter Ruin
 “ of themselves and Families. And further,
 “ as the Prohibitions of the new Act will
 “ doubtless be extended to all Manner of
 “ Swearing and Cursing by Writing, or from
 “ the Press, the People must either be con-
 “ tent with the foregoing Alternative, or en-
 “ deavour to relieve themselves by such
 “ Means as they shall think practicable.”—

And here how opportunely may these ma-
 licious Demagogues artfully insinuate what
 they please, to the Prejudice of his Majesty's
 Person and Government, and in Favour of
 the *Pope* and *Pretender*?

Indeed there is but too much Reason to
 fear, that if the new Act shall come to be ri-
 gorously executed, it will in effect be tying
 up the Peoples Tongues, or sewing up their
 Mouths. A general Silence must, for some
 Years at least, ensue, before they will have
 forgot the old or can be brought into the
 new Way: So habitual is the Practice of
 Swearing and Cursing in all Conversation,
 and of managing all Kinds of Business by
 Oaths and Execrations, become to the good
 People of *Great Britain*.—Therefore, and
 for the Reasons above exhibited, I can by

no Means think the said new Act well timed ; or that it is at all proper to tempt the Patience or Loyalty of his Majesty's hitherto faithful Subjects, at this precarious Juncture: The Times are hard, the Wars expensive, every Thing still continues dear ; and, notwithstanding the happy Victory gained by his Royal Highness the Duke in *Scotland*, the Temper of the People is yet rather too sour to admit of the Alienation of so valuable a Branch of their Liberties, as that of Cursing and Swearing according to their wonted Custom, and to as great Excesses as they please.

However, let us admit that the present Time is as proper as any other, for enforcing and extending the Laws against Profaneness, which by the Way I only grant in order to shorten the Dispute, and then let us enquire, whether such Laws are at all necessary in this Island ; whether as Things now stand, they can possibly be of any Benefit to the Publick, and whether they may not on the Contrary, prove detrimental. And the Determination of these Points will, consequently, demonstrate the Propriety of enacting or enforcing such Laws, either at this or any other Time.

In the Preamble to the new Act, the Necessity thereof is thus set forth, *viz.* " Forasmuch as the horrid, impious, and execrable Vices of profane Cursing and Swearing
" ing

“ ing (so highly displeasing to Almighty
 “ God, and loathsome and offensive to every
 “ Christian) are become so frequent and no-
 “ torious that unless speedily and effectually
 “ punished, they may justly provoke the
 “ divine Vengeance to increase the many
 “ Calamities these Nations now labour under.
 “ And whereas the Laws now in Being for
 “ punishing those Crimes, have not answer’d
 “ the Intents for which they were designed,
 “ by Means of Difficulties attending the
 “ putting such Laws in Execution: For
 “ Remedy whereof, &c.

I would not on any Account be thought
 wanting in all due Reverence and Submis-
 sion to the wise Determinations of that *Aug-
 ust* Assembly the Parliament of *Great-Bri-
 tain*. However as the Members thereof,
 both Lords and Commons are but Men;
 and as I take it for granted they do not de-
 sire to be thought infallible, so they will
 doubtless forgive me if I presume to say their
 Lordships and Honours may sometimes be,
 and sometimes actually are mistaken, or ra-
 ther, perhaps, mis-informed of the Subjects
 which come under their Consideration.

That profane Cursing and Swearing are
 horrid, impious, and execrable Vices, I can
 by no means admit; for if this were the
 Case, the Clergy would certainly have let us
 know it by their Compliance with the former

Acts

Acts against these pretended Vices. In those as well as in the late Act, the Reverend Gentlemen of this Kingdom were order'd publickly to read, on certain Sundays in the Year, the said Acts to their Congregations, in their respective Churches and Chapels assembled. But notwithstanding this Injunction, and the Penalties annexed in case of Noncompliance, it is well known that few or none of the Clergy have for these many Years past, so much as put their Flocks in mind that such Act or Acts have ever been made! Here and there indeed a simple Curate, or singular Vicar, perhaps may, for want of knowing better, once in Twenty Years, or so, have read the said Act or Acts to their respective Congregations; but as Examples of this Kind bear no Proportion to the Number of Noncompliers, they hardly deserve to be mentioned,

Now if what I have asserted *be true, and that it is, all England cries aloud through all her Parishes*, it follows that either the Senate did wrong in commanding, or the Clergy have done wrong in disobeying.

It is with extreme Reluctance that I take upon me to speak thus freely in an Affair that must so nearly affect the Dignity of either our spiritual or temporal Legislators, but I am under the Dilemma of Offending this Reverend or that illustrious Body, or of betraying

traying the Cause I have undertaken to defend: No Man therefore can blame me for acting with Integrity, let who will be displeased, or what will be the Consequence.

For my own Part, I make not the least Doubt that the Majority of my Readers will agree with me in deciding for the Clergy: For who can imagine that this numerous, this learned, this religious Body of Men could possibly be so unanimous in disregarding the parliamentary Mandate, had they thought it their Duty to obey it? Had they (and surely they are the best Judges) thought that Cursing and Swearing were such " execrable Vices, so highly displeasing to God " or so offensive to every Christian," they would certainly have been glad of any Assistance from the temporal Power towards putting a Stop to so growing a Practice. Or had they looked on the parliamentary Decrees against the Practices of these pretended Vices, as right, and reasonable, and fit to be executed; as likely to do any Service to Religion by the Suppression of them, or even but to have discouraged or abated such Vices, tho' in ever so small a Degree, or only to have set Bounds to their Growth; doubtless, on any of these Accounts, they would have rejoiced at and thanked God for the Opportunity of being any way Instrumental to such good Ends and Purposes.

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Instead of suffering such a Law to lie buried in Oblivion, they would rather have thunder'd it from the Pulpit every *Sunday* throughout the Year, and even peculiarly buſied themſelves in cauſing Informations to be laid before the Magiſtrates of all Offenders againſt it; by which Means, added to the prevailing Force of the Sermons which they would then have frequently preached on the ſame Subject, they might long before now have put a total Stop to theſe pretended Vices. But, the Clergy to be ſure have hitherto thought otherwiſe, and certain great Folks who ſhall be nameleſs have hitherto been ſtrangely miſtaken. Our Divines, 'tis true, have not openly aſſerted that the Practice of Curſing and Swearing is not ſinful; they have not verbally reſuſed to read the Act againſt this Practice; but as they have not heartily ſeconded the Endeavours of the Parliament, [we may be very ſure they tacitly diſapproved of thoſe Endeavours: And from this Conduct of the wiſe, and good, and Reverend Clergy, the follow- Inferences may be drawn.

First, That Curſing and Swearing are not Sins, conſequently are not “offenſive to God;” and therefore, *Secondly*, we need be under no Apprehenſions of their drawing down the divine Vengeance upon theſe Nations. *Thirdly*, that the Parliament hath been

been imposed on by those who brought in the Bill for the late Act; or rather, for the sake of Decency, I will say that the Members of both Houses were mis-informed, and that the Preamble to the said Act is founded on such mis-information. *Fourthly*, that there is no Necessity at this Time, for reviving, enacting, or putting in Execution a Law for suppressing the Practice of profane Swearing, &c. on a religious Account.

It now remains that we enquire whether the Suppression of the Species of Profaneness in Question can any way turn out to the Benefit or Advantage of this Nation in a political Sense. This Question however I shall not enlarge upon, as it may very well be cut short, by observing that no Body, at least that ever I have heard or read of, hath yet thought of or produced one Instance in the Affirmative; and therefore I shall take the Negative for granted, till such Time as a larger Field for the controverting of this Point, may be found.

But, on the contrary, I will undertake to make it appear that the Suppression of Cursing and Swearing will, in some Respects, as Things now stand, prove detrimental both to the religious and political Affairs of the Kingdoms of *Great Britain and Ireland*.

And,

And, *First*, every Body knows that tho' Christianity is the Religion by Law establish'd in the said Kingdoms, as well as in all other Parts of his Majesty's Dominions, yet, alas! it is equally notorious that this same Religion hath been long on the Decline, and is now at a very low Ebb in the said Kingdoms, but more especially in the Island of *Great-Britain*; where the Clergy (some by their slothful Negligence, and others by the unhappy Practice of continually puzzling and misleading their Congregations with unessential Points of Faith, and Matters of mere Controversy) have given the Atheists and Deists such Advantages in the Propagation of their Tenets, that Infidelity and Immorality are become the Mode among all Ranks and Degrees. Now, as Christianity is so universally neglected, or renounced, as Infidelity and Immorality so generally prevail; as God is so little regarded, or thought of, or mentioned, except when his Name is invocated by our common Swearers, Blasphemers, &c. surely it must be evident to every one who is not an utter Stranger to the World and to common Sense, that the Suppression of Cursing and Swearing, will as Things are at present situated, be the ready Way to make the Name of God totally forgot and buried in Oblivion. And how greatly this must tend to the Promotion of Atheism, Infidelity,

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ty, &c. I leave to the Imagination of the honest unprejudiced Reader: For how can it be expected that People should be able to withstand the Principles of Infidelity, or to argue in defence of the Being and Attributes of a Deity, whose Name may not be mentioned among them once in seven Years; and of whom, consequently, they must have but very inadequate Ideas? Some few, indeed of the Clergy may possibly take Occasion now and then to mention the Name of God in their Sermons, and to put their Flocks in mind of the Obligations of Faith and Morality; but when we consider how very few Folks go to Church (except where there happens to be a good Organ) and that even of these, what a small Number of the politer Sort mind what the Parson says; and of the meaner Classes, how few are qualified to understand him; when we, I say, reflect on this, we shall have but small Reason to hope that the Pulpit will be able to resist the Progress of the Enemies of Religion. When the Bulk of the People, who, as I have just hinted, never go to Church, I mean they never go out of Devotion, for Assignations, Marriages, Christenings, Funerals, or even Sleep, or to receive the Sacrament by way of Qualification for a Place, are all out of the Question) when they are deprived of the only Means by which they are now adays made acquainted with the Existence of such

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Beings

Beings and Places as a God, a Devil, a Heaven, or a Hell, viz. by the frequent mention of them, in all that vast Variety of Oaths and Curses in which the present Age abounds; what other Consequence can we expect, but that his Majesty's Subjects in General will, in a few Years, have entirely forgot all that their Godfathers and Godmothers promised for them at the Font, and will become as arrant Heathens as their Ancestors were in the Days of *Julius Cæsar*?

But, supposing this lamentable Consequence should not happen to attend the Observation of this new Act, which, by the Way, we have but small Reason to hope, yet there is still another no less to be dreaded by every true Son of the Church of *England* as by law establish'd, especially the Clergy. Nothing is more obvious to the whole World, than that we the worthy Members of this Church, are distinguish'd in all Places, upon all Occasions, and among all Ranks, from Dissenters in General, by nothing more than by the constant Custom of interlarding all Conversation with Swearing, Cursing, and Blaspheming; a Custom to which the Dissenters are generally very backward to conform: And this (as is supposed by all charitable Christians who are not Dissenters) meerly and for no other Reason but because the Church Folks do so; a Reason which is indeed usually assigned for every Thing wherein

wherein they dissent from the Doctrine and Practice of their Church Brethren. Now it is very certain, that notwithstanding this Singularity and affected Sobriety of Manners hath deservedly drawn upon the Dissenters the Aversion and Contempt of the worthy Members of the establish'd Church, yet, if the new Act shall happen to take effect, we shall insensibly fall into the same Way, into the very Conduct, Behaviour and Manners which are at present so obnoxious to us! And then how will our reverend Clergy look?—What a Scandal must such a Degeneracy of Manners, such vile Apostacy, reflect upon them, as well as on the Legislative Authority which occasioned it? How will the priestly, how will the episcopal Dignity be supported, when the whole Nation shall in effect, have turned Dissenters? *Sic transit Gloria Mundi!* Nay, and what will still aggravate the Mortification of the Clergy, the Nations round about us will be apt to suspect that even our spiritual Guides themselves are the principal Authors of all this Evil, by a Lukewarmness in the Duties of their Function: That they have shamefull neglected the good old Orthodox Practice of preaching against the Dissenters: That they have suffer'd that just Abhorrence of, and those laudable Prejudices against them; to languish and at length absolutely to transpire, from the Hearts and Principles of their

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Flocks;

Flocks ; merely for want of keeping the sacred Fire alive by a due Supply of Fuel from the Pulpit !—But, what is worse than all this, these Reverend Gentlemen, however innocent they may be of the Charge, may also be thought to have been even active Assistants and Promoters of this Melancholy Change ! They may be suspected of having themselves fallen into the Customs and usage of many of the dissenting Ministers, who are notorious for taking all Occasions of preaching up the Principles of Sobriety, Decency, Modesty, and certain other Duties merely Moral, as of equal if not of more Importance to us than many of our Articles of Faith ; and especially that such Things ought to be minded much more than any Party Distinctions, or regard for human Authorities. That by inculcating such Notions as these, and by seconding, or which may be thought equally Criminal, by not opposing the new Law against Cursing and Swearing, they have suffer'd the hitherto dutiful Sons of the Church to degenerate into a Crew of mere canting Presbyterians ! All this may laid be to their Charge, instead of the Encomiums which they have hitherto merited, on Account of their laudable Zeal for keeping alive the true Heroic Spirit of an Orthodox Churchman, who ever disdains the least Shadow of Conformity to the insipid Manners, nay, who hates the very Name of a Dis-

Dissenter: Who zealously adheres to the established Religion of his Country, be it what it will; and who, whenever a Dissenter appears in his Sight, is ready to cry out Huzza! the Church for ever! Down with the Rump! And G—d D—mn all Presbyterians.

After having thus shewn the lamentable Effects which the Laws against Swearing, &c. may have upon our Religion, it may perhaps be thought superfluous to insist on the Detriment which they may also derive to our political Welfare; especially as I have already shewn the Advantages which the Pretender and his Adherents may draw from their being enforced, the great Uneasiness which on that Account may arise in all Parts of the Kingdom, and the Ruin which the Penalties annexed, in Case of Non-compliance, may bring upon a great many Families. However, I shall enlarge upon one very important Article which perhaps may not have occurred to any of our Statesmen or Court Politicians: And this is the great Blow which our Credit and influence Abroad, will certainly receive, by Reason of the great Alteration which the new Act must if strictly enforced, produce in our Armies and Fleets.

I have had great Opportunities of being well acquainted with both our Land and Sea Forces, and I am very well assured that to deprive our Soldiers and Sailors, both Officers

cers and private Men, of their ancient Custom of Swearing and Cursing, will be full as prejudicial to their Courage, Activity, and Obedience to the Rules of Discipline, as to deprive them of their animating Brandy-Bottle before an Engagement; and may probably occasion the loss of more Victories than the Pride and Dissentions among their Commanders. And I will further take upon me to affirm that neither our Soldiers or Sailors of this Generation, will ever be brought to think their Officers in Earnest, unless their Orders and Reprimands are accompanied with the usual Volley of Oaths and Curses. Every one who has but a moderate Acquaintance with the Army or Fleet, knows very well that Swearing, Damning, Sinking, &c. cheers and enlivens both Men and Officers as naturally, and in as great a Degree, as the Huntsman's Horn does both Dogs and Men at a Chace; and that if they should be deprived of such Customary, such necessary Helps, their Spirits would flag, they would neither see, hear, nor fight; In short, they would grow stupid as so many Gate-posts, and be fit for nothing but to be sent into the Service of the States General!

And, further, I am very well informed (and every Gentleman who has travelled in foreign Parts will bear Witness, that what I shall hereunder advance is not more than Fact) that the Reputation which our Soldiers and Sailors

“ Sailors have acquired among the Nations
 “ round us, is by them consider’d as not so
 “ much derived from the Strength or Cou-
 “ rage of the modern Race of *Britons*, as from
 “ the great Exploits of their Ancestors. But
 “ that in Proportion as their Valour decays,
 “ they have improved in another Qualifica-
 “ tion, of which their Ancestors knew little
 “ or nothing; and by that Means, they
 “ make a Shift to sustain pretty tolerably
 “ their Reputation in Arms: In short, that
 “ our Enemies are frequently struck with so
 “ much Terror, on hearing the dreadful
 “ Oaths, Execrations, and Blasphemies,
 “ which are usually uttered by our Country-
 “ men in an Engagement, as often contri-
 “ butes more than the Force of Blows to
 “ decide the Victory. — That, in Respect
 “ of every other military Qualification, the
 “ *Britons* have been declining ever since
 “ the Days of *Cromwell*, and that it was not,
 “ so much owing to her Troops, as to her
 “ Money, and the Abilities of her Generals,
 “ that Queen *Ann’s* Wars were attended
 “ with so much Success: As may be con-
 “ cluded from the small Number of the
 “ *English*, and the great Number of the
 “ Allies which compos’d the Armies com-
 “ manded by the Duke of *Marlborough*.”

Now, if other Nations are prepossess’d
 with this Notion of the *British* Forces,
 (and that they are not so, I defy any Man
 living to prove) it follows, that if our Sol-
 diers

diers and Sailors are depriv'd of this their only real or suppos'd Superiority over their Neighbours, they must of Consequence lose their Reputation among those very Neighbours; and what foreign Power will think it worth its while to court our Friendship, or depend upon any Alliance with us when we have lost this only Superiority? — Let us then reflect seriously on this Consequence of the Laws against Swearing and Cursing. While our Forces continue unrivall'd by their Neighbours, in these their greatest military Virtues, we may yet support our Reputation Abroad, and make our Allies still think it their Interest to court, and esteem our Alliance. For to be sure, they will take it for granted, that as long as our brave Fellows appear neither to fear their God, or the Devil, but make as free with them as with their Comrades or Mess-mates; as long as they can dare to defy the Vengeance of the Omnipotent, and dread his Justice no more or not half so much as the Scolding of their Wives and Trulls; so long, I say, as our Forces maintain their Character, it will be absurd to imagine that such brave Fellows can possibly turn their Backs on their Enemies: Upon Enemies whom they know to be but meer Mortals like themselves, and who, perhaps, dare not for their Lives send forth one single Execration in answer to every forty issuing from their *British* Opponents.

F I N I S.